

Clinton to send Marines to Kosovo

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The United States will contribute 4,000 soldiers, including 1,000 Marines, who will be the spearhead of a NATO intervention force in Kosovo, President Clinton announced during his nationwide Saturday radio address. It was Clinton's first major policy announcement since surviving his Senate impeachment trial.

Clinton warned that the conflict in Kosovo between Serbian government forces and ethnic Albanian guerrillas could lead to "tremendous loss of life and a massive refugee crisis in the middle of Europe." He said it could spill over into neighboring countries. "It could even involve our NATO allies, Greece and Turkey," he added. Greece is aligned diplomatically with Serbia, while Turkey backs the predominately Moslem Albanian side.

Clinton made no reference to the threat of bombing raids on Serbia, which could begin as soon as February 20 according to US State Department and NATO officials. Serbian officials have been given a noon Saturday deadline to accept the NATO occupation of Kosovo or face air strikes. With American warplanes already engaged in daily attacks on targets in Iraq, there is a real potential for the Pentagon waging war against two small and virtually defenseless countries at the same time, with little or no public discussion within the United States.

The US announcement paves the way for a dramatic escalation of American and European military intervention into explosive political and ethnic conflicts within the former Yugoslavia. The initial American deployment would be units of the 24th Marine Expeditionary Force, now on board ship in the Mediterranean.

British units have also begun to move into place, with armor and heavy guns already on ships bound for the region. Both US and British forces would enter the Balkans through the Greek port of Thessaloniki, then

move overland through Macedonia into Kosovo. Some US troops would be airlifted directly into Pristina, the capital of the province, in a deployment which could begin in early March. Others would fly into Skopje, the Macedonian capital.

Clinton's announcement was timed to coincide with the opening of talks between Serbian government officials and Kosovo Albanian leaders at a chateau in Rambouillet, outside Paris. Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic, who will make the final decision on the Serbian side, is not attending the talks, reportedly for fear that he has been secretly indicted by the UN war crimes tribunal in The Hague and would be arrested if he set foot on French soil.

The talks have been convened by the six powers which comprise the "Contact Group" on Kosovo--the US, Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Russia--not so much for the purpose of negotiation as to pressure Milosevic into accepting the proposal already worked out by the six powers, which provides for occupation of Kosovo by an enormous NATO military force.

As many as 30,000 troops would be deployed in a territory not much larger than the state of Rhode Island. Kosovo would be carved up into five or six separate military zones, one for each of the major powers contributing troops. The designated US sector is the eastern corner, which borders on Macedonia and Albania, with headquarters in Gnjilane. Britain would occupy the central zone, France the west, Italy the south and Germany the north, the closest to Serbia proper.

The Contact Group has set a late February deadline in part to forestall the spring offensives which both the Yugoslav Army and the Kosovo Liberation Army have been preparing throughout the winter cease-fire. A similar pattern developed during the civil war in Bosnia, with rival ethnic forces acceding to NATO and UN-imposed cease-fires during the winter months, then

launching new attacks once weather conditions permitted.

The Kosovo intervention marks a major shift in US military policy in the region. Unlike the Bosnia intervention, Kosovo will be a European-led operation, with Britain supplying the largest number of troops, 8,000, as well as the commanding general. It will be the first time that American forces deployed in a combat arena have served under a non-US commander.

Some 4,000 German troops are to go to Kosovo, the first time that the *Bundeswehr* has participated in a military operation outside the borders of Germany since World War II, and the first time German troops have set foot in the Balkans since Hitler's invaders were driven out by the Red Army in 1945. Italian troops will also participate, in a region which was occupied by Mussolini's fascist regime during World War II.

Yugoslav President Milan Milutinovic referred indirectly to these historical questions in public statements in Paris on the weekend. Citing the guerrilla warfare waged by Yugoslav partisans against the Nazis, Milutinovic warned, "I cannot believe that they want a Vietnam in Europe. That would literally mean blood up to the knees. We have never given in to pressure in our history. Whatever has happened, we have always fought."

Milutinovic condemned the threats by Secretary of State Madeline Albright and other US officials that NATO warplanes would begin bombing Serbia if it does accept the Contact Group plan by February 20. "Bombing will not solve any problem," he said. "It could only cause terrible destruction and it could cost human lives. It would be a war crime and a crime against humanity."

Albright's response to Serbian defiance was to reiterate the imminence of NATO bombing raids. She said that noon Saturday, February 20, was a deadline which would not be extended. She praised the Kosovo Albanian delegation for accepting in principle the terms of the Contact Group proposal, which provides for a rapid withdrawal of Serbian police and Yugoslav Army forces from Kosovo, but delays any final decision on the province's political status for three years.

In Washington the Kosovo intervention was criticized by some congressional Republicans. Congressman John Kasich, who announced preparations for a presidential campaign in 2000, attacked Clinton's announcement as

"a terrible decision." Kasich and another prospective Republican presidential candidate, Senator John McCain, compared Kosovo to the intervention in Bosnia, where US troops were dispatched in 1995 on a supposedly one-year mission, but still remain.

McCain said the administration did not have a coherent policy in the region and had not formulated a goal for the peacekeeping operation. While McCain expressed concern over potential military conflict with Serb forces, another Republican leader, Senator Mitch McConnell, said that American troops could become the target of the Kosovo Liberation Army as well.



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